

The Policing of Political Belief in Great Britain 1914-1918

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Introduction

This paper traces the origins of the secret state by looking at how Britain reacted to a threat to its global status from Imperial Germany in the Great War period. As I write these words national security has become the most compelling issue of our times. Historically, National Security as a practice came into its own at the height of the Cold War when large Security Services in both blocs watched their populations for evidence of subversion and has reappeared again in the Clinton Bush, Bush Junior era. It has become relatively commonplace among historians to look for the origins of the Cold War national security state in the post 1945 period. . Writers draw on ample evidence that the Cold War F.B.I chief Edgar Hoover shared and was aware of the same fears as Vernon Kell of M.I.5, and vice versa.

Unfortunately, historical nearness of the long Cold War appears to have pushed aside the Great War period. Yet, the Security Services in the United Kingdom and in the United States were fearful of infiltration and subversion by the enemy in both the Cold War and the Great War. It is my contention that the Great War was a turning point for the development of covert belligerence, domestic intelligence and the two-power system in our century. Furthermore, in the Great War intelligence information was often based on irrational ideas which misled and misdirected policy. There are a large number of documentary sources such as the Lloyd George deposit at the House of Lords, the Vernon Kell private papers at the Imperial War Museum, and a variety of sources from wartime bureaucracies at the Public Record Office that substantiate this idea.

Given the huge budgets that the security services are allocated and the luxurious and conspicuous offices they inhabit, it is strange to think that the origins of the British national security state lay in a tiny committee convened to investigate the fear that a German spy network was operating in Britain. The threat of war, political unrest and the 'cunning' nature of the 'Hun' convinced Colonel James

Edward Edmonds, of the Committee of Imperial Defence [C.I.D], of the need for an agency to counter German espionage. There was no real evidence of a serious threat. A 1914 round up of alleged German spies found twenty-two. However, this exercise served to convince the Secret Services that the population needed greater surveillance to catch the rest. To Intelligence, the 'revolutionary' and the 'saboteur' lurked just beneath the surface of civilian life and fomented trouble through agitators and 'front' groups critical of the War.

Preparedness, Hostile Associations and the Hidden Hand

By 1918, the fears for national security had metamorphosed into a 'permanent program of preparedness' against Communism. The Great War was a watershed for Britain and one that completely transformed society and pitted industrialised societies in a 'Total War' against each other. Indeed, by 1915, a siege like war of attrition had replaced the highly mobile and fast paced one of Continental tradition, thereby making old tactics like the cavalry charge redundant. The distinction between civilian and soldier became blurred and the belligerents became dependent upon the attitudes of workers manning the production and supply lines.

Large military and civil bureaucracies were created to mobilise manpower and the distribution and supply of food and munitions. Moreover, war began to penetrate deeply into civilian society, as the State struggled for the hearts and minds of the population in order to ensure national security. The realisation that the war would not be 'over by Christmas' shattered a naïve Asquithian idea that the war could be run in a 'business as usual' manner. The thought that a lengthy war could undermine fighting morale fuelled a huge wartime growth in the Security Services. The head of M.I.5, Col. Sir Vernon George Waldegrave Kell felt that it was in the highest interests of national security to watch the civilian population to ensure that morale was behind the Government:

'It must be remembered that it is not the Police, or yet the laws, which create order and peaceful government, the real ruling power in this country is that most powerful of all forces, the moral force which springs from the will of the people.'

Kell commissioned reports from the Police, the military and other official and unofficial sources to monitor the moral condition of the nation. These reports were used to detect and control information leaks, sabotage, treason, and infiltration by the enemy. M.I.5 was a major force in the development of the control school of thought. Kell set the priorities for the surveillance, classification and control of potentially dangerous groups, individuals and ideas in the war since he had executive power and the support of the military establishment. Special Branch [S.B] officers were effectively his 'foot soldiers'. There were of course disputes and disagreements as to the allocation of resources, and over tactics, but never over the aims of Intelligence. A large body of documentary evidence exists to support the idea that the General Staff, the police, and core executive agencies, supported and promoted initiatives consistent with the Security Services belief in control of civilians.

It has become accepted among historians of the British Secret Services such as Hiley, Andrew, Englander and Thurlow that the definition of seditious and treasonable behaviour widened by the end of the war to include any activity that did not fit a narrow definition of patriotism. Senior figures in the military and Intelligence bureaucracies, and a number of dynamic figures in the Lloyd George Cabinet, helped this process. These were turbulent times. Social and historical developments in the 1914-1918 period such as the Russian Revolutions, industrial unrest, Aliens, and pacifist activities fuelled fears. This is documented by reference to political meetings, a riot, an alleged assassination attempt and other cases that were dealt with by the Military Intelligence and the forces of law and order.

It is undoubtedly the case that there are certain continuities between the invasion scares of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the wartime idea that a German 'hidden hand' was behind political opposition and industrial accidents. The 'hidden hand' idea was very compelling to the Cabinet and the Intelligence community, and promoted surveillance of the civilian population. This belief led to the creation of large Intelligence gathering ventures, such as the Home Forces network, under M.I.1 [d] that later became M.I.1 [a] in 1917-1918. The Intelligence Summaries [I.S] produced by G.H.Q recorded a huge diversity of events considered to be a threat to Britain. They included military reports on Giant planes, Zeppelins, submarines, and civilian matters. This last included drunkenness, venereal disease, opposition to conscription, public meetings, and fraternisation with P.O.W's. Summary reports also recorded the movements of spies, saboteurs, pacifists, Aliens and 'seditionaries' in the quest for the 'Hidden Hand'.

Kell expanded M.I.5's counter espionage role through the Home Forces network. To facilitate this process, by 1916 he had transformed the network into a wide-ranging survey of persons of 'hostile associations'. Moreover, the Intelligence community worked under the tacit assumption that the growth of Pacifist and Socialist movements was the result of enemy espionage. This situation led to the acceptance of the most preposterous of ideas at the very highest levels of state and government. Indeed, the head of Special Branch [S.B], Basil Thomson, learned from a meeting with an American State Department representative, that Germany threatened the whole English speaking world:

'...German conspiracies had gone so far as actually to plan a seizure of New York by surprise...Every office, even the Secret Service, is honeycombed with pro-Germans, who warn conspirators before they get arrested. There is a great body of Germans in the Middle West, who might easily bring about a local insurrection. He said that hideous as war was, war was actually needed to weld the Americans together.'

Over time fears that German spies were preparing Britain for invasion led to the formation of the Sub-Committee of the C.I.D on March 30th 1909. Lord Esher's committee resulted in the creation of a counter espionage and Aliens agency under Vernon Kell, called M.O. (t), then M.O.5 in 1914, and finally M.I.5. To the British, war seemed certain and Germany was a dishonourable enemy and therefore not above strengthening its position by using deception. However, the Germans did not need to be unscrupulous as from as early as 1851 military plans and designs were openly on view on the British stand of the Great Exhibition and the German Military took notes. With relatively open access to information the Germans had no need, or even desire, to build a subversion and espionage network in Britain. Moreover, the fact that Britain is an island society and was, at the time, innately suspicious of other races and nationalities made infiltration near impossible.

The Metropolitan Police Special Irish Branch, later called Special Branch, was set up in the 1870's in response to a Fenian bombing campaign and an influx of Russian Anarchist political refugees. Its role was to deal with groups that the Government, the Press and the Public saw as a terrorist threat to the British way of life. The horrific events of the Sidney Street Siege in 1910 had only reinforced an attitude that Britain was awash with foreigners with strange, violent doctrines. Paradoxically, Britain had traditionally offered refuge to political exiles, and London was a haven for revolutionaries like Marx and Lenin. Unfortunately, many Russian Anarchists did not understand that the Metropolitan Police were not like the brutal 'political police' of the autocracies they had fled. Moreover, their use of guns in the East End was completely alien to British life and because of this, the Sidney Street Siege remained a potent image thereafter.

Over time, the S.I.B expanded to cover Indian student nationalists and Suffragettes, Sinn Feiners and Russian Anarchists. These groups became powerful symbols of 'otherness' in a world dominated by white English males with

shared backgrounds of public school education, as well as university or military experience. They were people who believed firmly in the correctness of British rule and its Imperial 'civilising mission.'

William Le Queux, the popular spy novelist, was instrumental in fostering fears of German subversion and influence in the pre war period. His writings re-created a frightening world of conspiracies that were fomenting unrest and preparing Britain for 'The Day' of invasion. Le Queux, regularly sent bizarre reports to the Government and the Press stressing his absurd claims, such as a man seen near pigeons, and prompted both a moral crusade and the aforementioned Esher committee on national security. He was very influential and many of his readers took the 'Hidden Hand' seriously and demanded action to counter espionage.

Military Intelligence operations on the Continent partly fostered the growth of surveillance of political groups in Britain. Moreover, Lady Kell's biography of Kell shows that George Macdonogh, the Director of Military Intelligence, recruited Kell into M.I.5 to head a new Intelligence operation that would be a departure from the military tradition of scouting and spying. The Director understood that the Great War had mobilised entire populations and therefore Intelligence had to focus upon the whole of society and not just the armed forces. Moreover, in the Great War, the first 'total war', military success was dependent upon the goodwill of the workers and this was especially the case for the Germans who were under pressure from the blockade. As such Britain began an aggressive subversion campaign against German public opinion to capitalise on this 'Achilles heel'.

In 1914, organised Labour in Germany had agreed to an industrial truce or 'Burgfrieden' with the German Government for the war's duration. However, the demands made of German workers, such as conscription into mining, had weakened this truce and provided fertile grounds for Macdonogh's subversion operations. The 'Burgfrieden', as with the union sacrée in Britain, discredited the moderate Social Democrats and gave extremists and shop-floor agitators a

voice. In time, the Russian revolution became an 'icon' of political freedom and the idea of a workers-state became enticing to the most 'advanced' sections of the Left in Germany. Thus, British Military Intelligence aimed to break the will of the population and usurp the Kaiser's authority. Consequently, by August 1917, the German Labour movement was breaking into factions, and this gave the British an even greater opportunity to sow dissent and revolution in Germany.

In Germany, the British Secret Services section M.I.7 [b] attempted to undermine morale and stir up unrest by using aerial leafleting. This, and the Secret Service's funding and co-ordination of communist anti-war groups, such as the Briefenhall and Nemesis networks, had a profound effect upon the German military who were terrified of the consequences for civilian morale. Furthermore, General Macdonogh seemed to feel that a similar scenario was developing in Britain:

'General Macdonogh stated that his counter espionage department felt strongly that it would be a grave danger to allow Mr Petroff to return to this country...' and that Litvinof via the 'Woolwich Pioneer' was '...inciting the munitions workers at Woolwich to revolution.'

The sense of urgency in the Great War produced many Intelligence bureaux out of the new wartime bureaucracies. Indeed, at least one other agency, the Ministry of Munitions Department of Intelligence and Statistics Section [M.M.D.I.S], was interested in the attitudes of Labour in Europe as a guide to developments in Britain. The unit produced 'Foreign Labour Notes' that focused on the potential for revolution in the workplace, as is shown below:

'IV. Revolutionary Tendencies.

Spain...is the land of strikes...These manifestations are symptomatic of a general unrest, which is described as the legacy of Lenin... These doctrines are being put into effect by the Committee of Action or Soviet at

‘Olten’ and by ‘Soldiers Associations’... with a view to destroying the army after the Russian fashion...’

Most of M.M.D.I.S’s Intelligence reports focused upon the Army, breaks in production and the effects of Leninist Bolshevism upon the British workers:

‘A strike began at Malaga on the 28th June and for more than three weeks prevented the shipment to the Allies of accumulated stocks of lead and iron. The dispute does not appear to involve any question of wages and is believed to have been instigated by German intrigue. It was in any case very well timed for German interests.’

In 1917, as industrial action was spreading and Tsarism fell, the activities of socialist organisations came under deeper scrutiny. Other agencies, such as the Ministry of Labour, also wrote reports on British Labour that combined intelligent analysis and alarmism in equal degree. However, despite the portentous events, M.M.D.I.S’s May 29th 1917 report on Shop Stewards is a balanced and sober document that is dismissive of the ‘Hidden Hand’:

‘The allegation of course has been made that there is some sinister influence-some hidden hand- behind the movement. That, German Gold had paid for it, and that pacifists have cunningly engineered it to gain their own private ends. In so far as German Gold is concerned, one can only say that careful enquiry has failed to trace it.’

By mid 1917, M.M.D.I.S’s tone had hardened into a conviction that the Shop Stewards wanted to smash the State, and the revolutionary Leeds Conference of June 1917 combined with the events of the July days in Russia, probably provoked the change in opinion. The report’s author, came to believe that fanatics of the American ‘International Workers of the World [I.W.W], in the pay of Germany, were influencing the Shop Stewards and whipping them into a frenzy. Furthermore, there were older memories of the time of Industrial unrest in 1911-

12 when Continental and American ideas of Workers Control, Industrial Democracy and Syndicalism posed a threat to the *status quo*. However, it is doubtful whether this Industrial Unionism was a true danger to capitalism. Sorel's violent ideas and the concept of Marxist revolution never took hold in Britain.

However, the lack of a militant tradition did not stop the Trades Union movement from wresting far more out of the Establishment than was ever achieved on the Continent and in America. In the industrial areas of Wales and Scotland, curmudgeonliness, 'self-taught' socialism, and a large trade union membership along with a Presbyterian tradition fostered a deep resentment of the 'English' Government. These were the true thorns in the side of the employers and the State and not Hegelian dialectics or the spectre of class war over Europe. The Establishment's *bête noire* was the Triple Alliance of Trade Unionists that was formed in 1914-1915. Imperial warriors such as Basil Thomson, the head of S.B., wrote extensively on the Triple Alliance saying that it acted '...as a threat it was held *in terrorem* over the nation for seven years.' Ultimately, Thompson was so afraid of the power of workers organisations, he felt that the only panacea for widespread social disorder was, rather bizarrely, a war:

'I had said that unless there were a European war to divert the current that we were heading for something very like a revolution.'

He also believed in dealing severely with Leftist public disorder and reverted to the language of the Field:

'A single fox will clear out a hen-roost while it is cackling its indignation to the skies. If Louis XVI had mounted his horse and charged the mob there might have been no Thermidor...'

This very traditional right wing outlook was endemic among Cabinet 'Die-Hards' and his contemporaries in Intelligence such as Kell of M.I.5, 'Blinker' Hall of N.I.D and Basil Cockerill of Special Intelligence. If the historian Bernard Porter is correct. S.B's interest in Socialism dates from Thomson's appointment in 1913. Thomson's series of reports to the Cabinet on Revolutionary organisations are a fertile source for historians of fear and paranoia.

However, Kell was also deeply interested in radicalism, and among his papers is a lecture that analyses 'Socialism'. The lecture, naively, reduced socialism to a movement of poor and illiterate people who were 'corrupted' and taken over by militants and stressed how, over time '...disruptive elements began to appear', demonstrating the 'danger' of Internationalism to patriotism and democracy. The workers were portrayed as malleable, fickle and easy prey for German spies who were fomenting industrial unrest in Britain. Essentially, the Intelligence chiefs shared a similar lifestyle, outlook and experiences, and they were convinced of the need for a central Intelligence agency to combat socialism and German infiltration. Disputes over resources and tactics occurred, but overall they shared a common agenda, as Lady Kell innocuously noted in her biography of Lord Kell:

'All those at the War Office who were dealing with Military Intelligence, such men as General Sir George Macdonogh and Brigadier Sir George Cockerill gave him their unstinted support and always he could reckon on the willing co-operation of the Director of Naval Intelligence.'

My research has unearthed very little evidence of any major disagreement or dispute over the aims of national security within Intelligence, the Ministries and the Cabinet in the 1914-1918 period. They were 'chaps', who understood one another tacitly and possessed the qualities of personality that Rudyard Kipling would recognise immediately as 'clubbable'.

Despite at least six suppliers of internal security information, the Cabinet demanded ever more reports from the Intelligence cabal, to explain industrial unrest, explosions and Pacifism. Two issues motivated this demand for Intelligence; the feeling that even as late as 1918 the war could continue for another year, and that industrial unrest in Europe was part of German military strategy. The Cabinet had misinterpreted the call to halt the war and clarify aims as a manifestation of insidious German influence. For them, the 'hidden hand' was always one Intelligence report away, as Sir Edward Carson said:

'I think that the Cabinet should have reports from the various Secret Services to show whether there is any evidence at all that the enemy are supplying funds, either directly or indirectly, for the pacifist propaganda. We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the Germans have been very active in promoting industrial trouble in Russia, in the United States, in the Argentine and in Chile...It is almost unnecessary to point out that it does not follow that because no connection can be found... that no connection exists...'

The civilian control school of thought reached its zenith in 1916 when Asquith's *laissez faire* style of war administration was replaced by the more dynamic and interventionist approach of Lloyd George. It must have seemed as if the 'Die-Hards', Imperialists, Unionists and Tory Peers, described so vividly by Dangerfield, had finally killed off Liberal England. Indeed, as Minister of the Munitions of War, Lloyd George had smashed production targets and increased efficiency and now he sought to reform the war itself. His dynamism attracted what in the Cold War era would be called 'hawkish-hawks', and also Unionists with little compunction about curtailing personal freedom to achieve victory. Lloyd George and Imperial strongmen such as Churchill, Curzon, Milner, Amery and Hankey promoted an almost Social Darwinist drive for 'national efficiency' to win the war.

The 'inner Cabinet' lived in fear of disorder in the Empire from 'uncivilised peoples': from the 'childlike masses' in Russia, or at home from the 'great unwashed'. Churchill, for one, was deeply fearful of British Socialism long before the war. For example, he told his cousin Clare that Bolshevism was a crocodile that one either walked around or attacked. It seems that a consensus had emerged from within the 'inner Cabinet' of Unionists, Tories and dynamic Liberals of the Lloyd George Government over the need for a strong Security Service in war. Therefore, the most pressing issues focused on the Russian Revolutions and this was because the Cabinet, Intelligence, and some socialists felt that these established a precedent for Britain. Many Cabinet members felt revolutionary Russia was in a chaotic mess, and not the bold experiment that the Russells and others heralded as a new age of mass democracy:

'Here in Russia, it seemed, as nowhere else in the world, existed the conception of a modern civilisation.'

During the Russian Revolution the Cabinet felt strongly that there was a direct connection between Pacifism, workers control, Internationalism and German intrigue. There was a scintilla of truth in the suspicion that Germans were involved in the October Revolution. They did, after all, put Lenin on the train to the Finland Station. Moreover, the collapse of the Russian Front and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk convinced some in the Cabinet, the Security Services, and the Left, that Pacifist organisations were really 'fronts' for German espionage. The Russian peace discredited the Left in Britain, and added to the revulsion that many in public life felt about pacifists, and it confirmed suspicions that Germany was paying socialist and pacifists, such as Morel. Indeed, Lord Milner shared this suspicion about Morel long before the Russian peace:

'In no country but this would it be possible for him to carry on, but nothing can be proved against him and in spite of the fact that everybody knows

that he is a German Agent, he very nearly succeeded at the end of last week in bringing about a complete Labour revolt in this country.'

The earlier February Revolution came as a 'bolt out of the blue' and seemed to threaten the fabric of British society. Moreover, the revolution shocked the inner Cabinet and convinced them of the need for increased vigilance in the future. The Foreign Secretary Curzon had made a drastic misjudgement in a 1917 report on the situation in Russia. In this dispatch, written just before the revolution, he stressed the child-like nature of the Russians, and invoked the 'hidden hand' theory of revolt:

'That class as I say, is very much perturbed in mind at present, very restless, easily swayed. It is exposed at every point of the compass to German and pro-German influences, some open, many clandestine.'

Moreover, Curzon wrongly stressed that the Tsarist regime would remain in power:

'As far as the purely political aspect of the matter is concerned, I have formed the opinion that there is a great deal of exaggeration in the talk about the alleged disloyalty of the Army... For the autocracy alone holds Russia together and it will take something like a generation to organise anything in its place... Broadly speaking the danger which threatens Russia is not so much deliberate revolution as chaos...'

Shortly after the Revolution, Milner sent a flood of letters to the Premier on how to counteract the effects of Leftist agitation. In June 1917 he quotes a letter from '...a friend versed in the Labour movement', that refers to the Independent Labour Party [I.L.P] and the pacifist 'Union of Democratic Control', saying that:

‘...their immediate object has been to bring about a strike followed by rioting of such a nature that troops would be obliged to fire and from this they hoped to evolve a general strike which would bring the whole war up with a jerk here, in much the same manner as the revolution has stopped all military proceedings in Russia...’

Milner, like Kell, believed that a revolutionary strategy, orchestrated by Germany, was at work, and feared it deeply. Moreover, he feared a Russian style coup so greatly that he forwarded a secret document to the P.M. that recommended the shipping of Britain's Jews to Russia to bribe and corrupt Lenin. Indeed, Milner continued believe that a revolution was ‘imminent’ for the war's duration:

‘...and I fear the time is very nearly at hand, when we shall have to take some strong steps to stop the ‘rot’ in this country unless we wish to follow Russia into impotence and dissolution.’

The very British fears of Revolution and workers control were fed by the Russian dispatches of Sidney Reilly and others that appeared in the Foreign Office Confidential Print. At home the spectre of workers control at Barrow inspired Lynden Macassey of the Munitions Ministry, to set up his own Intelligence network in the region and designate it as a Red danger zone. Consequently, five months after the Bolshevik coup, and Milner's plea for action, the fear escalated, as an I.S from the Scottish Command reveals. The Shop Stewards Movement call to follow Russia and John Maclean's position as ‘assistant consul’ for the Bolshevik regime were recorded as ‘evidence’ of an imminent revolution:

‘The increasing activities of the more extreme elements among the Russian refugees in this district causes some uneasiness. They are trading on the situation created by the Russian Revolution, and in conjunction with John Maclean and his associates, are fomenting unrest among their compatriots, extending their propaganda from Clydeside to

Lancashire, they are undoubtedly a potential source of danger, their numbers being considerable.'

The I.S stressed the revolutionary nature of Maclean`s attendance at I.L.P meetings and stated that M.I.5, the War Office and Admiralty, had further reports on his activities. However, I S omitted to mention that Maclean`s revolutionary tirades were a symptom of his insanity. Luckily, for Maclean, the Cabinet were alerted to this by the Scottish Secretary who thought Maclean was '...more or less a lunatic...'

Another secret report from the spring of 1918, by the 'Die-Hard' Lord Willoughby De Broke, discussed the best strategy to adopt if the industrial unrest continued:

'But the attitude of those who are producing with their hands the weapons of war is of special importance. It would appear that if military action has to be taken to suppress strikes and to maintain order in the face of a hungry population, it must be efficacious and therefore ruthless to a degree not pleasant to contemplate. '

These were harsh words, yet De Broke merely expressed the opinions of many in Intelligence and a cadre in the Cabinet.

Winston Churchill, as Home Secretary, had witnessed the political violence of the Sidney Street Siege of 1910 and it influenced him deeply. Consequently, Churchill, along with Brigadier Cockerill, had drafted much of the pre-war legislation concerning Aliens and Leftist groups. The core laws passed were the Aliens Act, a revised Official Secrets Acts and a stricter Defence of the Realm Act. These Acts comprised the rule-book under which S.B, Home Forces, M.1.5 and N.I.D worked. Cockerill and Churchill had also learned a lot from the military failures of the Boer War, and they began to apply this wisdom to national security legislation:

'The South African War taught many lessons among others it provided the incalculable value of a military censorship and the need for strict regulations to prevent espionage and sabotage in time of war.'

Kell was a protégé of Cockerill's, and so it is not surprising that he placed great value on giving Intelligence work a sound legal basis:

'The test of a good security service is that all its actions are legal and done in support of definite laws.'

Another paper in the Kell collection again emphasises this concern for legality in addition to the need for absolute impartiality:

'The test of a good security service is that all its actions are absolutely legal in support of national laws, and on behalf of all the people, and never for one class or party or political purposes...'

Kell felt emphatically that 'legality' was the means whereby democracy distinguished itself from repressive police states and tyrannies. Furthermore, Kell saw M.I.5's role as providing an information clearing-house for Intelligence information, and to act in a consultative capacity to Government. He felt that his vocation was to work with '...Government Departments upon systems suitable in *war* for the control of all non-combatants and civilians, especially of Aliens...'

However, to be realistic, the strained climate of the war severely tested, if not shattered, the very high standards that Kell had set for the Security Services.

The Leeds Conference of June 3rd 1917 was an overtly revolutionary gathering and as such was a major test of the 'good secret service'. The British Socialist Party [B.S.P] intended to use the meeting to set up a Council modelled upon the workers and soldiers committees that had emerged in 1917 in Russia and on the

Eastern Front. Delegates of the I.L.P, the B.S.P and others promised the destruction of Capital through this 'Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies'. In a memorandum to the Premier, Milner voiced his fears that the meeting would damage national security and unity and was understandably indignant about a pledge, signed by Ramsay Macdonald, to bolster revolution in Britain. He believed that the rhetoric voiced at the conference was representative of British Labour opinion and a true threat to democracy:

'...this convention will begin to do for this country what the Russian Revolution has accomplished in Russia.'

Historically, the attempt to divide Britain into thirteen Soviets did not materialise, although the 'Central Committee' did meet twice. The policing of the two meetings reveals much about the assumptions and procedures used to control the civilian population in the Great War. In an S.B 'Special Report' on the "Workmen's and Soldiers Council meeting at the Brotherhood Church..." of July 1918, we see how a framework for policing Socialist activities was developed *ad hoc*, rather than in accord with D.O.RA.

The first meeting had a high attendance and the delegates were mainly women and Trade Unionists, who were sent by their organisations to find out what the Council represented. The discussion was expected to be orderly and peaceable, but an anti-pacifist mob attacked it in the opening stages and the meeting descended into a brutal mêlée. The police either could not, or would not, stop the rioters, despite the determination to disturb the peace of ringleaders like the Hoxton costermongers John Wilmott and George Healey. At the trial that followed, the magistrate blamed the meeting's organisers for the fracas and branded the clergyman, the Revd. Swann, as a dangerous militant who was undeserving of rights or justice:

'It might also be said that the people who let halls to an Association of this sort ought not to have the right to call upon the ratepayers to reinstate the buildings, which they must, in the ordinary course of events, expect would be damaged under such circumstances as that.'

Thus, the meeting was a cause of concern to the Government and was seen as a 'red rag' inciting workers to revolt and endangering the War effort.

Naturally, there was an outcry from the moderates at the meeting who flung an accusation at the Police that they had stood by and possibly aided the mob. The Police countered that pamphlets had told the mob where and when to attack and incited them to use violence, but these were never found. Nor was there a prosecution of the Daily Express, under D.O.R.A, for inciting political unrest, or for encouraging breach of the peace. The second meeting had a larger police presence but it was disturbed again, and the Police found a petrol bomb, which provided a legal pretext to shut the 'Soviet' down forever. An unsigned letter from a Chief Constable to Sandhurst of the Lord Chamberlain's office suggested using breach of the peace, rather than D.O.R.A., to close down the Council:

'I consider that meetings of this kind to be addressed by people like Bertrand Russell should be freely reported for prohibition. They seem regularly to lead to breaches of the peace and it is better to prohibit than to expend the time and energies of the Police in an endeavour to keep order.'

This biased message spread rapidly to the local Police stations, as a report by 'Acting Superintendent' Hopkins of Dalston Police Station, on October 14th 1918, shows:

‘...the speakers at these meetings have a tendency to advocate mischief or unpatriotic speeches which would strongly be resented by the majority of persons present and lead to riotous proceedings.’

Hopkins went on to request a prohibition of the meeting from the Under Secretary of State, arguing that any meeting would ‘probably’ move away from the legal subject as advertised. The Home Secretary George Cave granted this and forbade the Council from meeting on October 20th, under section 9A of D.O.R.A. The police never found persons unknown, possibly, in the pay of the Daily Express, who stormed the church.

Political policing had begun to drift away from Kell’s legal test of the ‘good secret service’, and this was justified as being in the interests of national security and for the sake of ‘our boys in the trenches’. For example, two Russian Jewish textile workers were arrested for picketing their factory and this combination of Socialist, Alien, and Jewish traits enraged the police and the Home Office, as shown by an unsigned note of December 10th 1916:

‘It is I think intolerable that a lot of Aliens, who have no legal right to be in this country at all and some some [sic] of whom should be in their respective countries fighting, should forming themselves into a Union, prevent our own soldiers having uniforms or other necessities. Therefore I think action should be taken to prevent. Production of necessities is within R42, whether the necessities are munitions or ‘war material’ or not. I think this case is one for the military to undertake. Strong and prompt action is necessary... This Alien Union chooses to say our men shall not work on machines on which non-union men have worked.’

The only inter-departmental disagreements that emerged in this case were over the safest way of prosecuting the pickets. Moreover, there was a distortion of official definitions of war work in an attempt to charge the two Jews. Later as it

was realised that the charges would not stick in court, the Police charged the group's Trade Unionist for placing a notice of the strike in the 'Jewish Voice'.

In a similar case, an eccentric producer of anti-war pamphlets, called Arnold Lupton, was suspected by Cockerill of being in the pay of Germany and running an espionage ring. The amount of time and resources used by S.B and the War and Home offices was vastly disproportionate to his significance. In time, Kell streamlined this laborious process and drafted legislation that made the prosecution of seditious and other persons with 'known hostile associations' a formality.

The Ministry of Munitions Labour Intelligence Department [M.M.L.I.] was set up on February 19th 1916 to combat suspected German sabotage in the munitions industry. The history of M.M.L.I shows how misleading the widespread belief in a 'Hidden Hand' actually was. The officers of this section were so unsuccessful in their search for German infiltrators and influences in the Munitions industry that they fomented their own conspiracies. M.M.L.I originated in a suspicion held by Churchill and Lloyd George, that explosions in the munitions areas of Ardeer, Silvertown and Woolwich were the work of Germans, possibly acting with other political saboteurs. After the Nobel Factory fire of July 1915, Lloyd George had immediately approved a plan for an organisation of secret police to investigate and combat sabotage, and this initiative eventually became M.M.L.I. Basil Thomson also felt that the explosions had political motivations, commenting on this he said:

'The criminal in this case may have been a discontented workman or a fanatical pacifist of the stop the war committee type.'

He elaborated on this, citing the flimsiest of evidence, to suggest that Pacifist propaganda caused violent acts of sabotage:

‘...some of the electricians in one of our filling stations had been heard to enunciate violent revolutionary sentiments and their technical knowledge was such that they could at any time have caused an accident, which while destroying the factory might have caused no loss of life if it were so timed as to take place when the hands were at home...’

By mid 1916, M.M.L.I. was tackling German sabotage by investigating home-grown subversion and labour organisations and by the use of *agents provocateurs*. The section grew rapidly and, by mid 1916, M.M.L.I was using an army of agents for this and other tasks. The increased risk of exposure this entailed may explain the change of name to Parliamentary Military Section 2 [P.M.S.2] in late June:

‘This step was decided on, as apparently M.M.L.I conveyed too much information as to the functions of this branch.’

As the work became less respectable, and M.M.L.I attempted to defend itself from public exposure, it was clothed in increasing secrecy. However, this tactic failed and the deceitful operations mounted by agents, possibly acting with the authority of Colonel F.A. Labouchere, and the acquiescence of Kell, eventually spilled into the public arena. In late 1916, M.M.L.I agents had convinced a group of naïve malcontents to plot against the State and at the trial that followed the cross-examination revealed the immorality of M.M.L.I’s methods. The transcripts of ‘Rex vs. Alice Wheeldon’ show Labouchere’s agents persuading Alice Wheeldon to send curare through the post and encouraging a murder attempt on the Premier and Arthur Henderson. It would seem that the lack of a revolutionary threat in Britain possibly prompted P.M.S.2 agents to manufacture their own. The case generated uproar in the House of Commons, and among the public, and led to the dismemberment and re-absorption of P.M.S.2 into M.I.5 [a]:

‘On 23rd April, 1917, P.M.S.2, a section of the Ministry of Munitions, formed originally from a nucleus supplied by M.I.5 [f] on the 19th of February, 1916, to deal with Aliens and others employed on munitions and auxiliary war services was reabsorbed as M.I.5 [a].’

Other research has uncovered similar evidence of attempts by William Rickard at B.S.P and I.W.W meetings to provoke violent and treasonable behaviour designed to demonstrate that the Wheeldon case was not an isolated incident. Moreover, correspondence between J.F Moylan of the Home Office and Wm. Rolph of P.M.S.2 shows a distinct lack of criticism of semi-legal and illegal activities and, in a sense, this silence indicates a possible complicity. Furthermore, I have found only one example of Home Office criticism and, that was over the inconvenience of the name change from M.M.L.I to P.M.S.2:

‘Dear Mr Rolph,

I have just received your letter of the 15th informing me of the fact that M.M.L.I have changed their name to P.M.S.2. I am afraid that it does mean me notifying many hundreds of Police Officers and Aliens Officers all over the kingdom...’

We can see also from the letter that M.M.L.I was an essential, and approved component, of national security policy in at least one of its functions, and possibly in its clandestine activities as well:

‘I suppose the change is absolutely necessary, but it is a great nuisance from our point of view.’

Indeed, if it was true that P.M.S.2 was directly accountable to M.I.5 and the Munitions Ministry, then the Cabinet, as their ultimate arbiter, tacitly approved of underhand methods.

There are few documents available on the work of P.M.S.2, but what does emerge is that the personnel originally came from M.I.5 and the military. Subsequently, M.I.5 reabsorbed some of the staff, after the Wheeldon affair came out, and removed their industrial unrest functions. Most of P.M.S.2's files were destroyed but some on prominent agitators were passed to Thomson, who continued the *agent provocateur* work and fed information to right wing 'patriotic' organisations. In reality, M.I.5 possibly refined its industrial relations work and focused it upon Kell's core concern about Alien influence in Britain. In the end Thomson officially took over the burden of controlling domestic subversion as a sop to public fears of military dictatorship:

'Dec. 21 [1916]

I had my first interview with Sir George Cave, the new Home Secretary, having ascertained from Sir Edward Troup that General Taggart had been criticising the police information about labour unrest, impelled thereto by Major Melville Leigh [sic], of the military intelligence. I told Sir George that it was very dangerous to have soldiers spying on workmen. They would raise a cry of military dictatorship and provoke strikes. Sir George promised to see Lord Derby and stop it if he could.'

Moreover, the Ministry of Munitions was now eager to erase this embarrassment from the office stationery. However, after P.M.S.2 ceased business on April 2nd 1917, the reorganised M.I.5 [a] began hunting Bolshevik subversion from its Cork Street base, as correspondence between Major Sealy Clarke of M.I.5 [a] and J.F Moylan shows:

'Dear Moylan,

Russians Employed on Munitions Work

In view of the recent events in Russia and in view of a probable change of attitude on the part of Russians in this country who are working on munitions, we should very much like to have early and first hand

information... denoted by: ... pacifist literature or anti war propaganda... or any active tendency towards holding up supplies either by restriction of output or destruction of output of factories... we should be glad to know if there are indications in this direction so that we could immediately consult the Ministry of Munitions as to withdrawing permits to work.

This document shows that M.I.5 [a], possibly with Kell's blessing, policed national security holding a tacit assumption that virtually all opposition to the war from any group was related to Bolshevik Russia. Likewise, M.I.5 [a] continued the work begun by P.M.S.2 but redefined it as work concerned with Russian propaganda and Bolshevik inspired strikes. It seems that Ramsay Macdonald's public speeches and questions in the House of Commons about Alice Wheeldon generated enough negative publicity to force an official reorganisation of domestic Intelligence.

The I.S also stressed how counter-productive the use of agents *provocateurs* and labour spies was. Henceforward, *Wheeldon vs. Rex* acted to confirm the Left's endemic paranoia and effectively besmirched the Government. In addition, the misfits employed by P.M.S.2, especially William Rickard ['Alex Gordon'] became symbols of Government skulduggery. The I.S illustrate how the Wheeldon case became a touchstone of infamy, by which some in the Labour movement judged the future actions of the Government and Security Services:

'It is well known that secret service agents of the Government are to be found in all industrialised centres: but they are all known. I think this is a feature of the conduct of the war which is more resented by the people concerned than almost any other.'

The document quotes a 'Shop Steward' met in a Sheffield barbershop:
'...as for Lloyd George and Curzon and Milner and the rest of the gang they are just damned scoundrels. They spy on us but their damned spies

learn nothing. We know all their spies every mother's son of them. What is more, we hold the whole gang in contempt because they send out spies on us. Why can't we be trusted?'

In fairness, it was hard for the Cabinet to develop a relationship of trust because the Sheffield Shop Stewards were militantly squaring up to the Government at a time of crisis. Notwithstanding this, the quotation expresses an earnest plea for trust and co-operation that echoed throughout the I.S sent to M.I.5, and especially in the Police reports attached as appendices. For example, one Police report from an Aberavon I.L.P meeting shows that Labour was bitter about the spying because it implied weakness, treachery and treason:

'Things that are happening now can hardly be said to be Christian like. Well as you know many things have been said about us, we have been called pro-German and that we have love and affection for the Kaiser. We have plenty of spies in our midst, some amongst us here tonight, and these spies are supposed to be great patriots...'

Another S.B report of an ex soldier's anti-war activities reveals the same bitterness:

'The speaker went on to say that he had some nasty things to tell them and he was sure they would not all agree with him. "The Secret Service Agent is here" but he did not give a damn for him or the government (at this point a woman who is invariably seated on the platform of these meetings pointed to where I was seated in the body of the hall, consequently a large number of the audience looked in my direction).'

The exposure of informants at public meetings may have motivated the police to adopt concealment, as with a Leeds Amalgamated Society of Engineers meeting shortly after:

'I beg to report that detective Inspector Dalton concealed himself in the Colisem [sic] on Sunday Morning...in such a position that he could hear all that took place, and see the greater part of the Hall.'

Moreover, the doubling of Intelligence operations in an area meant that the Security Services caught other agents in the act of provoking trouble. This may explain a Home office report from late 1916, on the provocative Grimsby agitator and troublemaker 'Gordon'. The N.I.D had called for strong measures to stop the National Council Against Conscription, and the police subsequently filed a report:

'Gordon seems to be about the leading man in the movement. He was until about two years ago employed in the Grimsby Post Office as Postman, and was discharged as medically unfit. He is mentally deranged and has for a number of years been trying to enlist the notice of the public by causing strife. He states that their present strength is nearly 1,000...their present strength is three.'

In all of the documents used for this research, there is only one civil servant, a Labour Ministry Intelligence Officer called Robert Chorley, who openly disapproved of infiltration of the Labour movement, but he too used Labour spies. Nor does Kell suggest that the case contravened his legal test of the good secret service. Rather, the agency was possibly disbanded because agents committed the cardinal sins of being caught, being amateurish and overpaid and, for the Home Office and Munitions Ministry, an inconvenience, as Thomson suggested:

'Dec 1 [1916]

Neal Primrose, Lord Rosebery's son, asked me to undertake the whole of the intelligence service on labour matters for the whole country on behalf of the Ministry of Munitions which had been running an amateur service of its own under Colonel Labouchere. This service is very expensive. It has a

host of private agents who produce little that cannot be found in the local press.'

However, despite the paucity of information, M.I.5 directed the Home Forces to widen surveillance; and their reports began to record the opinions of Quakers and Anglicans as examples of revolutionary dogma. The law-abiding octogenarian, philanthropist Joseph Rowntree of York, was smeared for marrying a German and being related to Morris, a 'conchy', and Arthur, a plain speaking Scarborough worthy. Moreover, as Intelligence continued to find no evidence of German espionage, the reports became ever more detailed and trivial. The German breakthrough on the Western Front in the spring of 1918 increased the devotion of the Security Services to Intelligence and initiated a period when criticism of the Government was not allowed, as one observer noted:

'The cause of the War, its pursuance to the Knock-Out, was thus elevated to a sacred principle, a religious conviction which none might question.'

As the war situation became critical, then the support of the Home Front became ever more crucial to victory, and the definition of unpatriotic behaviour expanded. However, the salient issues remained the Clyde Workers Committee, the Shop Stewards Movement, and Russian influence. These were in turn linked circumstantially to the activities of clergymen, Quakers, freethinkers, loudmouths and other Establishment critics of the aims of war, such as Lord Lansdowne:

'Recrudescence of Bolshevism

The peace movement associated with the name of Lord Lansdowne has given the extremists their opportunity...The movement embraces people who want to stop the war for any reason from the religious objectors who dislike bloodshed and the extremists with a social revolution in view, up to big business interests who are losing money...'

The categories became so diffuse that almost any group but the Intelligence Officers themselves became suspects. The same report shows a marked ignorance of Bolshevism and takes revolutionary rhetoric at face value: 'Tchernin: "Revolutionary ferment is extending continually in England. Its central point is Scotland... the chief organisers and agitators are members of the Zimmerwaldian movement...'

Conclusion

Fundamentally, the Bolsheviks, and at times the Cabinet, misunderstood the successful British moderate Trade Unionist tradition. In the case of 'Tchernin', he did not even understand the geography of Great Britain, and thought Scotland was English. The Cabinet viewed everything through the lens of the Russian experience, and so thought that the unrest at Barrow was revolutionary rather than regionally based. The Cabinet could not of course foresee that the greatest threat to Europe would come from the far right in power in Germany and Italy but it does seem that the 'urgency' of the Bolshevik 'threat' possibly delayed the policing of what later became British Fascism. Indeed, Churchill later sacked Kell in 1940, for not recognising that the Right Club member, Tyler Kent, had breached national security. This developed much in the same manner as the way the Soviet threat, and Liberal multiculturalism, delayed the surveillance and policing of Moslem militant revolutionary extremism in our times.

In time, as the realisation sunk in that the Bolsheviks could survive the Civil War, Marx's revolutionary spectre haunted the democracies even more and Intelligence may have reinforced this. Intelligence officers were possibly eager to have their opinions accepted at Cabinet level and were naturally disinclined to seem sympathetic to communism, or to criticise the war aims. The years 1918-1919 were awash with revolutionary activity in Europe, and in Britain there were police strikes, support for Russia, and soldiers impatient for demobilisation. These events, plus the revolutionary propaganda that issued from the Comintern

of 1919, vindicated the predictions and fears of the previous five years, and strengthened the case for a permanent national security state to control unrest.

The documents used in this research demonstrate the rise of a school of thought that saw the civilian population as subject to dangerous influences and in need of surveillance and control. This was paramount when Lloyd George came to power on December 6th 1916 with a majority of Tory interventionists and a quiescent Labour Party. Likewise, bureaucrats and willing professionals, such as Kell, were prepared to be proactive and dynamic in their approach to political policing and social control of the population. Furthermore, Kell, Thomson and Cockerill had kick-started the development of a central Intelligence network that came into its own during the war crisis. In particular, the Russian Revolutions, industrial unrest, and pacifist agitation, acted to confirm the fears that underlay national security thinking and fostered an expansion of Intelligence networks. This investigation has also shown that Kell, as an acknowledged authority on national security, may have transgressed his own standards of legal propriety. It is possible to say that Kell's irrational fears of infiltration led to a situation where any means were justified to root out the 'Hidden Hand' that was allegedly behind almost all opposition.

Personnel who were trained in Kell's organisation seemed to flout the conventions of the good security service. In a similar way, the Security Services, and other authorities, used irrational fears of German subversion to justify their actions over and over again. Moreover, events such as industrial explosions scared the Cabinet deeply and legitimised the creation of more Intelligence agencies to locate the non-existent saboteur. This in turn placed an onus upon agents to find the mythical 'Hidden Hand'. Consequently, agencies, such as P.M.S.2, fomented conspiracies, via the use of *agents provocateurs*, to legitimate the extension of surveillance of workers organisations, pacifists and other critics of the war.

Fundamentally, a wartime sense of danger and crisis impelled the growth of the national security state in 1914-1918. A sense of emergency fostered misleading Intelligence that led to panicky judgements and erroneous decisions. Violent political events, in the pre war period, buttressed wartime anxiety and overwhelmed a rational discussion of war aims. In particular, Foreign Intelligence reports on the effectiveness of British subversion of German morale kindled anxiety over unrest in Britain. Likewise, Russian scenes of chaos and class vengeance shocked the 'Die-Hards' and convinced them of the need for more Intelligence to pre-empt Revolution in Britain.

The Security Services constructed a hierarchy of 'dangerous types' that placed foreign nationality, or blood, at the top, and political allegiance and associations with Aliens just below. This classification moved and shifted with the needs of the war, and eventually more social and political activities were reclassified as 'hostile' to the Government. Yet, after an initial round up of German spies by M.I.5 in 1914, there were no major breaches of national security by Aliens and no evidence of industrial sabotage. However, the fears of a 'fifth column' were to reappear again in the Second World War, with the internment of many patriotic, though fascist, critics of the establishment for their alleged association with Germany.

Powerful supporters of the national security state, such as Churchill and Macdonogh, gained the ascendant in wartime and established political policing and control of the civilian population as a permanent option for the Government. Likewise, from at least 1916 onwards, the 'Die-Hards' of Lloyd George's inner Cabinet, zealously promoted a view that Germany was fomenting political unrest during the war. However, with Germany defeated, the strong opinions of Cabinet members such as Maurice Hankey underwent a sea change. Moreover, Hankey felt that the Kaiser's exile signalled a restoration of Europe's balance of power and as such Germany should act as a bulwark against Bolshevism:

‘...we ought to try and build up the self respect of the German people so that they will resist the approach of Bolshevism and believe in their own civilisation rather than in that which comes from Russia.’

The same scenario re-emerged in 1945, when the U.S.A. dusted down the image of Germany as a bastion against communism and brought it out for use in the Cold War. Moreover, a climate of ‘crisis’ and danger reawakened fears of communist subversion and expanded the national security state. Peacetime tended to diminish the urgency of the concerns of the control school of thought that was developed in the Great War. In terms of the development of the national security state, the Great War was a crucible in which the fears of bureaucrats, the military and politicians were melted together. The crucible was then poured and the mixture cast into a prototype national security state to be used for future crises. Today we are left with a national security state on both sides of the Atlantic that has failed to adapt to the end of the Cold War and has failed to justify a huge budget.

At the end of the last century, MI5 was more concerned with social security cheats, Yorkshire Miners, and stopping the media from broadcasting Irish voices, than anything else. The workshy, the Bolshevik and the Alien were constants in the history of the secret state and in a very subtle sense National Security and surveillance of the civilian population had become fixed around the century old concerns of Kell and Thomson. The international history of the Security Services teaches us that there is always a threat to order, or a crisis, at hand to justify increased expenditure on national security when a rational allocation of resources would be far more efficient.